

hurricane of dust. Barracks only a few feet away were soon completely obscured by walls of dust, and I was fearful that the wind might sweep me off my feet. I stopped every few yards to lean against a barracks and catch my breath and then plodded on to school. When I got there, I found that many of the children had braved the storm to come to school and were already waiting for me in the classroom.

It touched me deeply to see the eagerness of the children to learn despite the desolation of their surroundings and the meager tools for learning. At the time they seemed to adapt with equanimity and cheerfulness to this total and bewildering upheaval of their young lives, although the experience may well have inflicted permanent damage to their psyches.

I tried to conduct class, but dust poured into the room from all sides as well as from the hole in the roof which still lacked a chimney. It soon became obvious that we could not continue classes, and it seemed prudent to send the children home before the storm grew worse and stranded us all at school until evening. The teachers of Block 41 hurriedly dismissed school for the day, urged the children to be careful, and hoped they would make it safely to their home barracks.

That night the wind reached such terrible force I was sure our barracks would be blown apart. Pebbles and rocks rained against the walls, and the paper we stuffed into the cracks was quickly blown back into the room. Dust seeped in like smoke. For hours the wind shrieked around us like a howling animal, rattling and shaking our flimsy barracks. I wondered what I would do if I ever had a roomful of children under my care during another such storm but faced the sobering reality that actually there was not a thing I could do. The wind stopped short of destroying our entire camp, but I learned later that many of the camp's chicken coops had been blown out into the desert.

The following day, the non-Japanese head of elementary schools reprimanded the teachers of Block 41 for having dismissed school without consulting him. With no telephones in the barracks, however, there was no way we could have reached him in the Administration Building at the opposite end of camp. He had been unreasonable and inept in other matters as well, and this was simply the last straw. We were willing to put up with the physical inadequacies and to work hard to overcome them, but arrogance and insensitivity on the part of a white employee was too much to bear. These were days of such frustration and despair that we were often close to tears, and the teachers of Block 41 were

ready to resign en masse. The high school teachers, with problems of their own, were similarly demoralized. Only our superintendent, Dr. John C. Carlisle, who had the wisdom to accord us some dignity and understanding, prevented the mass resignations of the entire resident teaching staff. Eventually, with the appointment of a new and able elementary school head, things simmered down.

Toward the end of October we began to see snow on the mountains that ringed our desert, and even afternoons began to grow cold. A coal shortage soon developed and hot water was limited to two hours between 7:00 and 9:00 P.M., bringing on a hectic scramble for the showers each evening.

The sheetrock crews finally came to the block where I lived but moved at such a snail's pace that when the first snows fell in Topaz, they still had not reached our barracks. As if to compensate for this delay, we discovered one morning that small ten-by-twenty-inch mirrors had been installed over each basin in the washroom. By this time, however, we had grown so accustomed to living without mirrors that it was almost a shock to look up and see our sun-browned faces looking back at us.

A succession of dust storms, rain squalls, and a full-fledged snow-storm finally brought our limping schools to a complete halt in mid-November. Snow blew in from the holes that still remained in our roof, and we all shivered in ten-degree temperatures even though we wore coats, scarves, and boots. An official notice finally appeared stating that schools would close and not reopen until they were fully winterized with sheetrock walls and stoves. It seemed close to miraculous that we had been able to hold any kind of school for as long as we had, and I knew it was possible only because the children had been so eager to come and the residents so anxious to have some semblance of order in their lives. Although my class had just begun a Thanksgiving project of cardboard cabins and pilgrims, we were happy to leave it half-completed on the table, hoping that when we returned our classrooms would finally be warm and livable.

As the cold, bleak winter months came upon us, the residents of Topaz grew increasingly frustrated and despondent in their isolated barbed-wire enclosure. Tensions and internal friction increased, and I, like most of the evacuees, felt a desperate need to get out of camp and back into the mainstream of life. I was fortunate to get a scholarship to Smith College to complete my education, and my sister was invited to a Quaker retreat in Pennsylvania. After what seemed an interminable

Topaz, City of Dust

wait, our indefinite leave papers arrived, and we were able to leave Topaz in May of 1943.

As we boarded the dusty bus for Delta where we would catch our train to the East, it was as though we had finally come to winter's end, and now, at last, were within reach of spring. The afternoon sun was already hot and a slight breeze filled the air with a fine haze of dust. We looked out the bus window and waved to our parents and our friends, wondering when we would see them again. I watched from the window as long as I could, waving until my mother and father were two small spots in the cluster by the gate. I knew they were waving long after they could no longer see us. I turned then, and faced the road ahead. We were on our way back, at last, to the world we had left over a year ago.

The budding plum
Holds my own joy
At the melting ice
And the long winter's end.

—Yukari¹

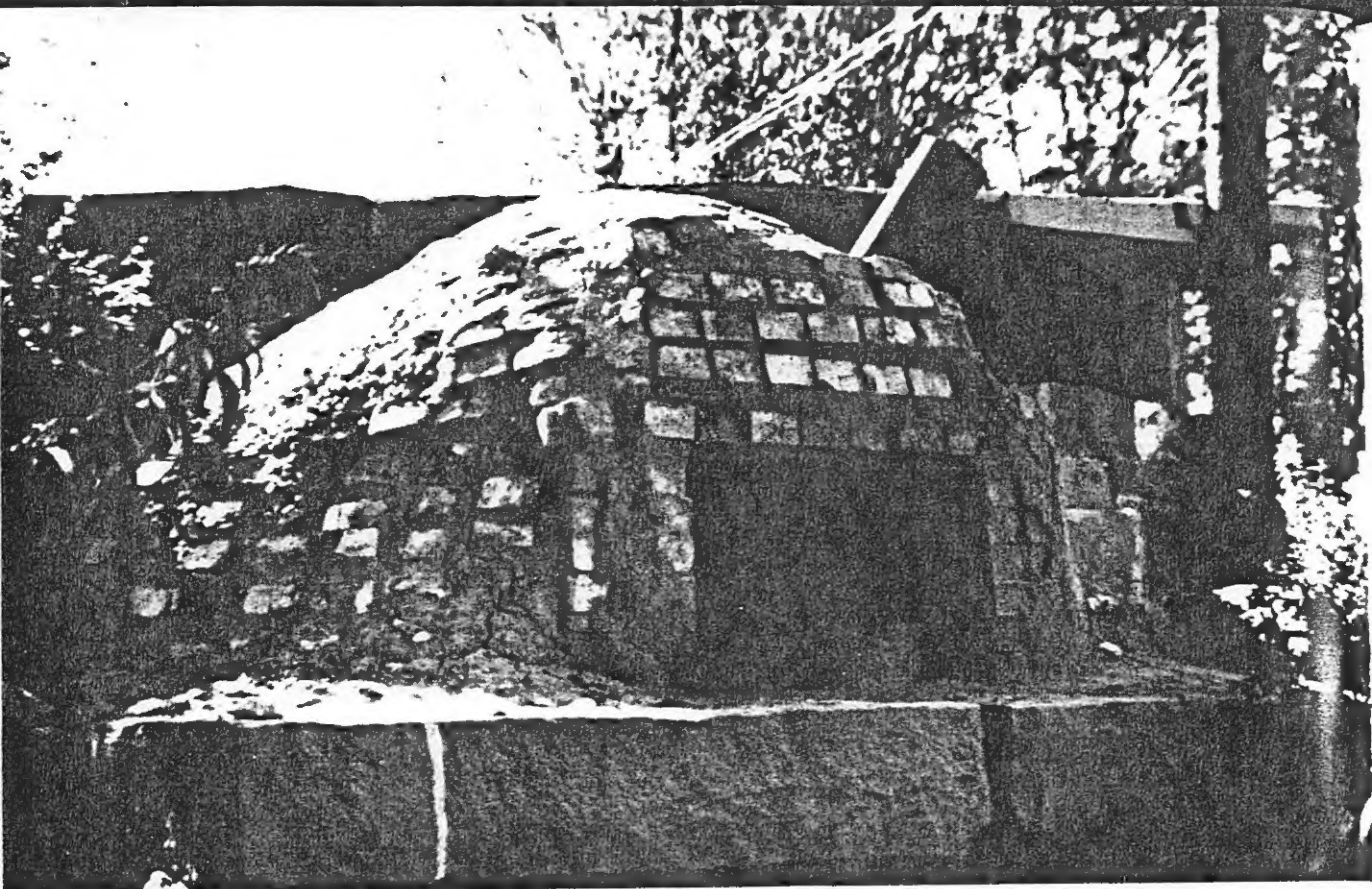
¹ The poem, written by the author's mother, was translated from the original Japanese.



Helper Main Street looking toward Steamboat Mountain and Balance Rock to the left. Greek Town was off to the left foreground, out of the picture. USHS collections.

Greek school was the symbol of the struggle of our parents to keep their ancient culture and our ambivalent reaction. Like the Bonacci court, it was of me, of my people; but when I said goodbye to my best friend, Helen Barboglio, and she went off to play, to read, to be free, I envied her Americanism, although her parents were immigrants, her mother English, her father Italian. Of all aspects of our culture, attending Greek school made us feel most different from others.

We were safe there, safe in Greek Town, and in the YMCA. A festive air traveled with us on Greek Town excursions when women held bounteous open houses for their husbands and sons on their name days. We walked down Main Street past the Japanese Fish Market, the Japanese Noodle House, Japanese novelty store. Greek coffeehouses, Joe Barboglio's Helper State Bank, the Italian Quilico Furniture Store, and Ricci's Meat Market, the Chinese-American Cafe with two signs in the



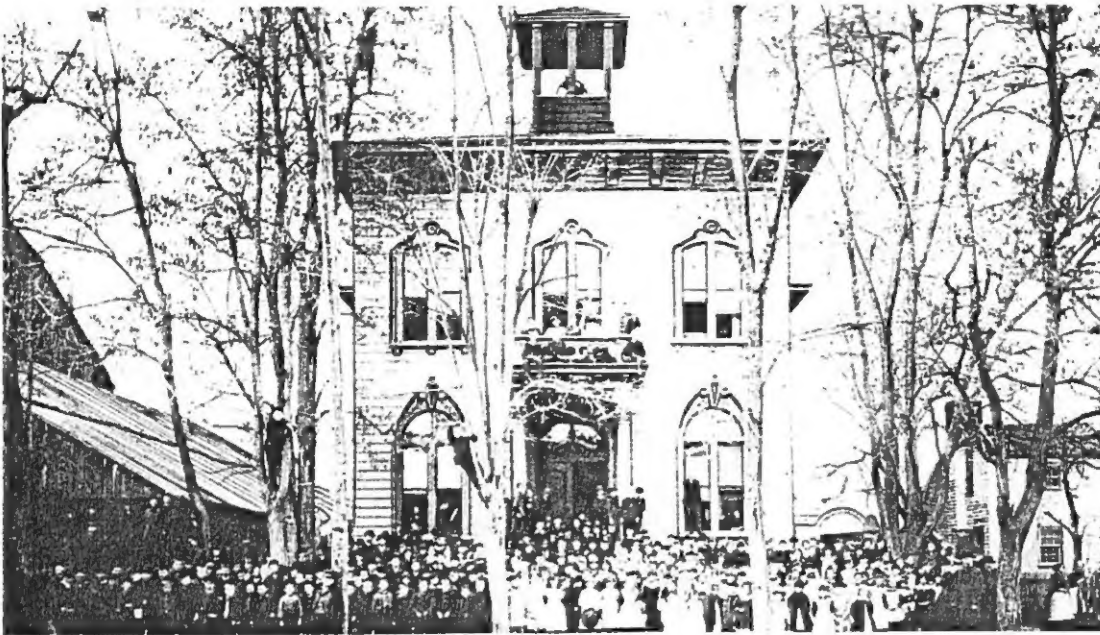
A dome oven of the type remembered by the author. Few of them remain today. This one in Carbonville was originally owned by Foto and Paul Liapis. Photograph by Philip F. Notarianni.

window: Whites Only and White Help Only, the Greek stores: the Golden Rule, Sanitary Market, Toggery, Grill Cafe with a tank of green water in which trout swam, the Cretan restaurant and coffeehouse, and on beyond the school into Greek Town.

Clusters of houses were set here and there in the dessicated earth, each with a small garden and cascades of silver lace vines on the wooden porches. In the backyards, shiny and smooth from the lye and soap of wash waters, were wash houses, coal and wood sheds, rabbit hutches, chicken coops, pigeons, and domed earth ovens supported on wooden stilts.

The warm, yeasty scent of baking bread hovered over Greek Town, and mothers were quick to cut us large pieces and slather them with butter. The admonition we heard from our mother daily came with the offering: "Bread is holy! If you drop it, make the sign of the cross and kiss it before eating. If it can't be eaten, bring it to me to burn. Never throw bread in the garbage! Bread is holy!"

The mothers used high-pitched voices when visiting and their talk was punctuated with the proverbs we heard throughout each day: "What can you expect? 'An apple from the apple tree falls.'" "Worthless people! 'Stars fell and pigs ate them.'"



*St. Mark's Grammar School at its First South location.
USHS collections.*

actuality, the school was not for girls only. It was designed "to meet the special educational needs of girls, although boys under 10 years of age were received and prepared for entrance into . . . St. Mark's Grammar School."²³ Because of the similarity of the two names, the new endeavor was often called simply the Basement School. "This was entirely a self-supporting school," said Bishop Tuttle,²⁴ referring to the fact that no scholarship students were enrolled in it and that it received no support from the Episcopal mission organizations in the East. The members of the parish did much to keep the school self-supporting. In addition to their regular contributions to the parish, they paid tuition that was slightly higher than that charged by St. Mark's Grammar School. Charlotte E. Hayden was employed as teacher and manager of the school, but she was assisted by ladies of the parish as well as by the clergy of the cathedral. "Many of the first students were boarded with nearby Episcopal families further illustrating parish support."²⁵ One who might have given

²³ Untitled typescript, Archives Collection, Alumni Office, Rowland Hall-St. Mark's School.

²⁴ Tuttle, *Reminiscences*, p. 373.

²⁵ John Dixon Stewart, "A History of St. Mark's Cathedral Parish, 1867-1967," multi-lithed, (n.p., n.d.), p. 17.